



Does eating local food reduce the environmental impact of food production and enhance consumer health?

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Abstract:

The concept of local food has gained traction in the media, engaged consumers and offered farmers a new marketing tool. Positive claims about the benefits of local food are probably not harmful when made by small-scale producers at the local level; however, greater concern would arise should such claims be echoed in policy circles. This review examines the evidence base supporting claims about the environmental and health benefits of local food. The results do not offer any support for claims that local food is universally superior to non-local food in terms of its impact on the climate or the health of consumers. Indeed several examples are presented that demonstrate that local food can on occasions be inferior to non-local food. The analysis also considers the impact on greenhouse gas emissions of moving the UK towards self-sufficiency. Quantitative evidence is absent on the changes in overall emissions that would occur if the UK switched to self-sufficiency. A qualitative assessment suggests the emissions per item of food would probably be greater under a scenario of self-sufficiency than under the current food system. The review does not identify any generalisable or systematic benefits to the environment or human health that arise from the consumption of local food in preference to non-local food.

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Resource Description

Exposure :

weather or climate related pathway by which climate change affects health

Unspecified Exposure

Geographic Feature:

resource focuses on specific type of geography

None or Unspecified

Geographic Location:

resource focuses on specific location

Non-United States

Non-United States: Europe

Climate Change and Human Health Literature Portal

European Region/Country: European Country

Other European Country : United Kingdom

Health Co-Benefit/Co-Harm (Adaption/Mitigation): ☒

specification of beneficial or harmful impacts to health resulting from efforts to reduce or cope with greenhouse gases

A focus of content

Health Impact: ☒

specification of health effect or disease related to climate change exposure

Health Outcome Unspecified

Mitigation/Adaptation: ☒

mitigation or adaptation strategy is a focus of resource

Mitigation

Resource Type: ☒

format or standard characteristic of resource

Review

Timescale: ☒

time period studied

Time Scale Unspecified